

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
SOUTHERN DIVISION

DAVID MCCARTHY,	)	
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	Case No. 1:06-cv-327
	)	
v.	)	Honorable Gordon J. Quist
	)	
JOHN RUBITSCHUN et al.,	)	
	)	
Defendants.	)	
_____	)	

**OPINION**

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, and ordered Plaintiff to pay an initial partial filing fee. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A. The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim.

**Discussion**

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff is incarcerated in the Macomb County Correctional Facility. In his *pro se* complaint, he sues the Michigan Parole Board, Parole Board Chairman John S. Rubitschun, and parole board members Barbara S. Sampson, Enid Livingston, and James Quinlan.

Plaintiff maintains that Defendants twice denied him parole in violation of his due process rights under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments and MICH COMP. LAWS § 791.233 (grant of parole; conditions). He specifically argues that Defendants departed from parole guidelines categorizing him as having a “high probability of parole”; and that Defendants based their denial on false, inaccurate, and/or “irrelevant” information.

For relief, Plaintiff requests a declaration that Defendants have violated his constitutional rights; injunctions prohibiting Defendants from violating MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.233 and from relying on false or inaccurate information at his next parole interview; fees; and costs.

## II. Immunity

In addition to the Michigan Parole Board Chairman and three parole board members, Plaintiff has named the Michigan Parole Board as a Defendant in this case. The Michigan Parole Board is part of the Michigan Department of Corrections. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.231a(1). Regardless of the form of relief requested, the states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts, if the state has not waived immunity and Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98-101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *O’Hara v. Wigginton*, 24 F.3d 823, 826 (6th Cir. 1994). Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute, *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979), and the State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in federal court. *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). Therefore, Defendant Michigan Parole Board, as part of the Department of Corrections, is immune from injunctive and monetary relief. *See Fleming v. Martin*, No. 01-1422, 2001 WL 1176354, at \*1 (6th Cir. Sept. 26, 2001) (Michigan Parole Board entitled to

Eleventh Amendment immunity); *Carson v. Parole Bd.*, No. 88-1277, 1988 WL 79688, at \*1 (6th Cir. July 27, 1988) (same).

To the extent Plaintiff names the remaining four Defendants in their official capacities, they are immune from monetary relief. Members of a parole board have absolute immunity from damages liability for actions taken in the performance of their duties regarding the decision to grant or deny parole because that task is functionally comparable to that of a judge. *Hawkins v. Morse*, No. 98-2062, 1999 WL 1023780, at \*1 (6th Cir. Nov. 4, 1999); *Tillman v. Price*, No. 96-2032, 1997 WL 225993, at \*1 (6th Cir. May 5, 1997); *Ward v. Moss*, No. 94-1417, 1994 WL 664948, at \*1 (6th Cir. Nov. 23, 1994); *accord Scotto v. Almenas*, 143 F.3d 105, 110 (2d Cir. 1998); *Wilson v. Kelkhoff*, 86 F.3d 1438, 1444 (7th Cir. 1996); *Anton v. Getty*, 78 F.3d 393, 396 (8th Cir. 1996); *Little v. Bd. of Pardons and Parole Div.*, 68 F.3d 122, 123 (5th Cir. 1995) (per curiam); *Russ v. Uppah*, 972 F.2d 300, 303 (10th Cir. 1992). The actions for which Plaintiff complains were taken by Defendants Rubitschun, Sampson, Livingston, and Quinlan in their quasi-judicial function of deciding whether to grant or deny Plaintiff's parole; therefore, they are entitled to absolute immunity from monetary damages.

Plaintiff's allegations against the four individual Defendants for relief other than monetary damages fail to state a claim, as discussed below.

### III. Failure to state a claim<sup>1</sup>

A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted when it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the

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<sup>1</sup> In *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 125 S. Ct. 1242, 1248 (2005), the Supreme Court clarified the rule set forth in *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994), when it held that "a state prisoner's § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner's suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – if success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration." (Emphasis in original). Plaintiff does not seek release from prison; rather, he requests declaratory, injunctive, and monetary relief. As a consequence, under *Wilkinson*, his success in the present action would not necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of his continued confinement, thus, the action does not appear to be *Heck*-barred. Nevertheless, assuming that Plaintiff's action is cognizable under § 1983, it fails to state a claim as set forth herein.

allegations of the complaint. *Jones v. City of Carlisle*, 3 F.3d 945, 947 (6th Cir. 1993). To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Plaintiff alleges that he was denied parole in violation of his Fifth and Fourteenth Amendment Due Process rights. He fails to raise a claim of constitutional magnitude. Plaintiff has no liberty interest in being released on parole. There is no constitutional or inherent right to be conditionally released before the expiration of a prison sentence. *Greenholtz v. Inmates of Neb. Penal & Corr. Complex*, 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979). Although a state may establish a parole system, it has no duty to do so, and thus, the presence of a parole system by itself does not give rise to a constitutionally-protected liberty interest in parole release. *Id.*; *Bd. of Pardons v. Allen*, 482 U.S. 369, 373 (1987). Rather, a liberty interest is present only if state law entitles an inmate to release on parole. *Inmates of Orient Corr. Inst. v. Ohio State Adult Parole Auth.*, 929 F.2d 233, 235 (6th Cir. 1991).

In *Sweeton v. Brown*, 27 F.3d 1162, 1164-65 (6th Cir. 1994) (en banc), the Sixth Circuit, noting “the broad powers of the Michigan procedural authorities to deny parole,” held that the Michigan system does not create a liberty interest in parole. The Sixth Circuit has recognized the continuing validity of *Sweeton* and has continued to find that Michigan’s parole scheme creates no liberty interest in being released on parole. See *Ward v. Steagall*, No. 03-1804, 2004 WL 614581, at \*1 (6th Cir. Mar. 24, 2004); *Martin v. Ohio Adult Parole Auth.*, No. 03-3642, 2003 WL 22976604, at \*1 (6th Cir. Dec. 8, 2003); *Bullock v. McGinnis*, No. 00-1591, 2001 WL 180978, at \*2 (6th Cir.

Feb. 14, 2001); *Turnboe v. Steagall*, No. 00-1182, 2000 WL 1679478, at \*1 (6th Cir. Nov. 1, 2000); *Hawkins v. Abramajtys*, No. 99-1995, 2000 WL 1434695, at \*2 (6th Cir. Sept. 19, 2000); *Irvin v. Mich. Parole Bd.*, No. 99-1817, 2000 WL 800029, at \*2 (6th Cir. June 14, 2000); *Clifton v. Gach*, No. 98-2239, 1999 WL 1253069, at \*1 (6th Cir. Dec. 17, 1999). Also, in unpublished decisions, the Sixth Circuit has held that particular parts of Michigan's statutory parole scheme do not create a liberty interest in parole. *See Fifer v. Mich. Dep't of Corr.*, No. 96-2322, 1997 WL 681518, at \*1 (6th Cir. Oct. 30, 1997); *Moran v. McGinnis*, No. 95-1330, 1996 WL 304344, at \*2 (6th Cir. June 5, 1996); *Leaphart v. Gach*, No. 95-1639, 1995 WL 734480, at \*2 (6th Cir. Dec. 11, 1995); *Vertin v. Gabry*, No. 94-2267, 1995 WL 613692, at \*1 (6th Cir. Oct. 18, 1995); *Neff v. Johnson*, No. 92-1818, 1993 WL 11880, at \*1 (6th Cir. Jan. 21, 1993); *Janiskee v. Mich. Dep't of Corr.*, No. 91-1103, 1991 WL 76181, at \*1 (6th Cir. May 9, 1991); *Haynes v. Hudson*, No. 89-2006, 1990 WL 41025, at \*1 (6th Cir. Apr. 10, 1990). Finally, the Michigan Supreme Court has recognized that there is no liberty interest in parole under the Michigan system. *Glover v. Mich. Parole Bd.*, 596 N.W.2d 598, 603-04 (Mich. 1999).

Furthermore, the presence of specific parole guidelines does not lead to the conclusion that parole release is mandated upon reaching a "high probability of parole." As stated by the United States Supreme Court, a state's scheme may be specific or general in defining the factors to be considered by the parole authority without necessarily mandating parole. *Greenholtz*, 442 U.S. at 7-8. At the time that *Sweeton* was decided, there were statutory factors to be considered by the parole board. *See Sweeton*, 27 F.3d at 1164 n.1 (noting that MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.235 listed "a large number of factors to be taken into account by the board.") Although the current parole guidelines may be more detailed than the former statutory provision, they are still nothing more than factors that are considered by the board in assessing whether parole is appropriate. The fact that the Michigan Parole Board must follow their own procedural statutes and regulations

regarding parole does not raise an issue of federal due process. *Id.* at 1165. This is particularly so in light of the fact that the guidelines do not state that the prisoner “must” or “shall” be paroled if the prisoner scores in a certain category; rather, the guidelines still speak in terms of probability, thus leaving the ultimate determination of parole release with the parole board. In an unpublished decision, the Sixth Circuit has found that where the ultimate decision regarding parole rests with the parole board, a prisoner has no protectable interest in a system which determined a “grid score” for when he would be eligible for parole. *Moran*, 1996 WL 304344, at \*2; *accord Aqeel v. Dahlman*, No. 90-3459, 1991 WL 7102, at \*1 (6th Cir. Jan. 25, 1991) (where statute and guidelines place parole decision in hands of the board, there is no liberty interest). Because Petitioner has no liberty interest at stake, his due process claim must fail.

Plaintiff’s related allegation that Defendants relied on false information to deny his parole also fails to state a claim. Assuming that the parole board did rely on false information, Plaintiff’s claim does not present any constitutional violation. *See Pukyrus v. Olson*, No. 95-1778, 1996 WL 636140, at \*1 (6th Cir. Oct. 30, 1996) (no constitutional violation by having false information placed in a prison file); *Carson v. Little*, No. 88-1505, 1989 WL 40171, at \*1 (6th Cir. Apr. 18, 1989) (inaccurate information in an inmate’s file does not amount to a constitutional violation). Because Plaintiff has no liberty interest in being paroled, Plaintiff cannot show that the false information was relied upon to a constitutionally-significant degree. *See Maiden v. Johnson*, No. 98-1479, 1999 WL 507207, at \*1 (6th Cir. June 10, 1999); *Draughn v. Green*, No. 97-1263, 1999 WL 164915, at \*2 (6th Cir. Mar. 12, 1999); *Perotti v. Marshall*, No. 85-3776, 1986 WL 16695, at \*1 (6th Cir. Mar. 14, 1986). Therefore, Plaintiff fails to state a claim for a violation of his due process rights.

**Conclusion**

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's action fails to state a claim and will therefore be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b).

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$455 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the "three-strikes" rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$455 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This dismissal counts as a strike for purposes of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: August 10, 2006

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/s/ Gordon J. Quist  
GORDON J. QUIST  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE